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A HISTORY  
OF THE  
ORIGIN AND PROGRESS  
OF THE  
DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

IN LETTERS TO A WORKING MAN.

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BY A LAYMAN.

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**Abstract**

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# HISTORY, &c.

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## LETTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.—THE DOCTRINE NOT TAUGHT IN JUDAISM.

SIR,—It is an obvious source of satisfaction to the enquiring mind; when in addition to the conviction of his understanding, that the pure river of truth has been polluted by some muddy and noisome additions, he is able to trace the origin of the mischief; and when his researches conduct him to the precise spot where the troubled and feculent waters mingle themselves with the living stream. The object of the present letters, are to afford some contribution to the latter kind of guidance, in reference to a doctrine once esteemed vital by universal Christendom, but now fast losing its hold upon the minds of the awakened and reflecting portion of mankind; viz. the doctrine of the Trinity.

I address these letters to you, and through you to the rest of the working classes of this empire; for these, amongst other reasons, (viz.) 1st. Because I believe that thought is awakened amongst you, that you are prepared for the thorough investigation of some of the highest subjects in religion and politics; and that whatever temporary inconvenience may arise during the progress of such enquiries, they will, if properly conducted, ultimately result in very beneficial consequences to mankind. 2nd. Because you have not in general the means of procuring those expensive books, by which light on subjects like the present is to be obtained; and the majority of the individuals who are paid for teaching you religion do not desire to free you from prevalent superstitions. They are either too interested, or too ignorant to show you the simple beauty of Christianity, when divested of the extraneous and cumbersome apparel in which she has been clothed.

The doctrine that there are three persons in one God, each equal in power and dignity, and each co-eternal, but performing distinct offices and parts in the administration of

the affairs of this world, is a belief so strongly recognized and enforced by what are called orthodox Christians, that a rejection of it is deemed fatal to salvation. The doctrine is laid down in its naked absurdity in the Athanasian creed. Many of its adherents are, however, ashamed of it in its full developement, and have invented a number of terms—such as hypostases, essences, distinctions, modes, diversities, quiddities, and similar jargon, in order to give what they are pleased to term explanations of the doctrine, and at the same time with a view to cover some of its most glaring deformities. Without taxing your attention with a long statement of the doctrine itself, which you may readily enough find in the creeds of most orthodox churches, and in all its fulness in the Athanasian creed, I shall at once state the questions which I propose in a few letters to you, to answer. They are as follow :

1st. Is the doctrine in question, a doctrine of genuine Judaism.

2nd. Was it taught by Christ ?

3rd. Can it be clearly traced to the bewildering speculations of Paganism ?

It is to the last of these questions that my letters will be principally directed ; the two first must be answered briefly.

In reference to the first question, viz. whether the doctrine is found in pure Judaism, a decided negative must be given. Those who have tried to make out the contrary have insurmountable difficulties to contend with ; some of which I shall notice.

1. The *verbiage* of Trinitarian theology is absent from the Old Testament, which contains the records of the Jewish faith and history, and the sayings and doings of its sages and prophets. Its language is entirely omitted in that document, in every form of expression in which it is now taught in schools of theology. Neither the word ‘Trinity,’ nor any of the phrases employed to explain what is meant by the doctrine, are to be there met with ; nor is there in the Bible any oriental word which can be fairly translated into these expressions. This is a startling difficulty, to say the least of it. It is not an objection to be trifled with. If a belief in the Trinity be essential to salvation ; if it formed part of the ancient Jewish faith ; where is the word for it, or the corresponding expression, teaching it ? Show me the

plain statement, or any thing not merely identical with, but even similar to, any of the explanations which Christian divines have given of the doctrine. Is it then a thing easily to be credited that a truth, the firm reception of which is held to be of such pressing importance, that without it a man shall perish everlastingly—should not have been revealed; or revealed so obscurely, that no Trinitarian theologian exists on the face of the earth, who can define his belief, and give his creed in the language of the Bible?

2. The first argument ought to be decisive, so far at least as to strip the belief of the doctrine of that importance in the affair of salvation, which many ascribe to it, even supposing the creed itself could be *inferentially* deduced from the Bible, by the dexterity of critical conjectures or learned scholars. Trinitarians express their dogmas in *express terms*, and they are unable to teach the method of salvation, what they term the true belief, *without* such terms—yet these terms are not in the Bible, nor is any thing corresponding to them to be found in that book, in any form of eastern language. Then where can the importance of the doctrine be, if the Bible were intended to teach the way of salvation? Are only critics and scholars to be saved? Is the way of salvation a plain path, a high road, so clear that the way-faring man, though a fool in respect of learning, may not err therein? We will, however, leave this objection, and turn our attention to the efforts made, *not* to find the thing *plainly taught*, but to deduce it by *inference* and *conjecture*, for Dr. Pye Smith, a zealous Trinitarian, admits that it is a doctrine no where expressly taught in the Bible, but rather to be found there by a method of '*cautious induction*.' Now the deducers of this theory must be in a desperate condition, when they affect to see the doctrine in a 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' ejaculated by a pious heart of old—or from the plural termination of the Hebrew word 'Elohim,' when the fact of the plural termination being given to Hebrew words, expressive of dignity and authority, is notorious to scholars; and when the argument, if it proved any thing, would prove that the Jews believed not in several *persons* in one God, but in *several Gods*; in other words, that at the time they used this expression, they were, like the surrounding nations, Polytheists. A blessing thrice repeated in Numbers vi. 24—26, is held to

be sufficient basis for deducing the mysterious propositions of the Athanasian creed; the word or fiat of the Almighty, his power, his influence when found with personal pronouns attached; though the same be done of the wind, the trees, and various other elements, and productions of nature, are made into distinct Gods; every metaphor—every personification—every dark ambiguous phrase is seized upon, to afford inference in support of a beloved and profitable superstition. Phrases applicable to God, and even the term God, were in frequent use amongst the Hebrew people, to denote the power and strength of heroes, princes, and warriors; but, notwithstanding the fact of this usage, (generally concealed from the unlearned,) the Trinitarians wrest words used of any temporal deliverer, or of one whom by any ingenuity they can make typical of Christ; or the terms of a prophecy, which, by the convenient theory of a ‘*double sense*,’ they can apply to Christ, though primarily it might have evident reference to another; and having from such questionable premises come to the conclusion that Christ is God, they imagine they have advanced one step at least in support of the Trinitarian theory. These, and numberless similar modes of argumentation, common to Trinitarianism which I might adduce, and which with this hint you will readily find in ordinary books in support of the doctrine, cannot fail to force upon every reflective and unprejudiced mind the conclusion, that the Old Testament furnishes no vestige of support to the doctrine—that the doctrine had first been invented, and that the proofs of it had to be sought for afterwards—that the theory was first promulged and received; and then the Bible tortured to support it.

3. The mode of reasoning, by which the doctrine is supported from isolated texts in the Bible, is unfair and illogical; the premises being unsound, and the conclusion strained and unproven. The Trinitarian asks you to believe that this text proves God *the Father* to be God—that another proves Christ also to be God; not the Father but God the Son; that another proves the Holy Ghost to be God, but neither God the Father, nor God the Son, but God the Holy Ghost. After he has persuaded you, principally by appeals to your fears, and by threats of damnation, to believe that the texts bear such meaning, and you begin

in your simplicity, to add God the Father to God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and find you have got *three* Gods, he then turns round upon you, and insists that he did not mean three *Gods*, but three *persons* in *one* God, though up to this time the former was the very point he had been contending for ; and notwithstanding he had been showing that certain separate texts proved each of these, viz. The Father, The Son, and the Holy Ghost to be severally God. His *premises* and argument go to show that there are three distinct Beings, each with a peculiar office, will and agency, and that every one is God ; his *conclusion* is that they are not God, but three distinct *persons* in one Godhead.

Many eminent Trinitarians admit that the doctrine is not found in the Jewish records ; and that in point of fact, it was not revealed at all to the Jewish people ; thus conceding at once the negative, for which I am in this letter contending. One of these writers (Dr. South) says, ' That God concealed the Trinity from the Jews is *evident*, because the Old Testament, that great ark and depository of the Jewish religion, contains in it no text that plainly and expressly holds forth a Trinity of persons in the Godhead ; several being indeed urged for that purpose, though whatever they may allude to, they seem not of that force of evidence as to infer what some undertake to prove by them.'

' It is evident (says Bishop Tostal) that from the authorities of the Old Testament, sufficient and clear proof cannot be drawn, either for the Trinity, or for a plurality of divine persons.'

The Old Testament (remarks Steuchus Eugubrius) is designedly silent concerning the Trinity ; lest the Jews, who were prone to idolatry, should hence take occasion to err.

' The doctrine of the Trinity, says another (Cardinal Bellarmine), was not propounded expressly to the Jews in the Old Testament, because they were incapable of it.' Other admissions to the like effect might be quoted.

What ancient patriarch ever announced to mankind that there were three persons, or three subsistences in God ? Such a doctrine formed no part of the laws or lessons of Moses. Is there any such thing laid down any where in the Pentateuch, even sufficiently apparent to justify the most far-fetched inference. The author of the Pentateuch

has not left much to conjecture ; even matters far less important than theologians make of the Trinity are defined with rigid exactness ; and the particulars, not only of a moral law, but the minutiae of *ceremonies*, are detailed with an accuracy which embraces the exact pattern, size, and shape of utensils ; of the habiliments of the priest, and almost every gesture and genuflexion of the worshipper ; yet amidst all this particularity, this vitally essential doctrine of a Trinity in unity, this stepping stone to heaven, is most carelessly omitted, or left to the strained deductions of ingenious and imaginative critics. The prophets merit the same censure—not one of them seems to have been able to make an Athanasian creed, nor ever to have hit upon a representation or explanation of a Triune God ; or to have given to the world any of those truly edifying anatomical sketches of the essence and mode of subsistence of the Deity in three persons, which have since furnished such excellent employment for Divines. Abraham, the Father of the Jewish people, remained steady in the worship of one God, for this he was distinguished, and for this he was rewarded. His prayers and thanksgiving are to God alone, and his language of devout submission is : ‘ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do.’ And the language of God to him is : ‘ I am the Lord, I will bless thee and thy seed after thee.’ Judaism then began with the selection of Abraham for his devotedness to one God. All the laws and institutions of genuine Judaism are of the same monotheistic character ; unencumbered by subtle distinctions and divisions of the divine nature. The divine announcement in the law of Moses is : ‘ I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Thou shalt worship no other God.’ In Deut. xxxii. 39, God is represented as saying : ‘ See now that I am he, and there is no God with me.’ The worship instituted by Moses contains no address to a Trinity ; no offering of prayer ; no ascription of praise to a Triune Deity. The teachers and prophets of the Jews bear testimony to the same great truth, the unimpaired unity of the Deity. Elijah asserts, that ‘ The Lord he is God.’ The Psalmist declares his interpretation of providential judgments to be for this purpose, ‘ That men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth.’—Psalm lxxxiii. 18. Isaiah introduces



God asserting: 'I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory, I will not give to another.' 'Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.' 'I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God.'—Isa. xlv. 6. 'I am Jehovah, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.'—Isa. xlv. 5. 'Is there any God beside me, yea there is no God, I know not any.'—Isa. xlv. 8. Jewish prophecy points to the ultimate triumph of pure Monotheism, to the day when Jehovah shall be the recognized 'King over all the earth, in that day there shall be one Jehovah, and his name one.' The confession of faith of the modern Jews is: 'I believe with a perfect faith, that the Creator, blessed be his name, is the Creator and Governor of all creatures, that he alone has made, does make, and will make all things. I believe that the Creator, blessed be his name, is only one, in unity to which there is no resemblance, and that he alone has been, is, and will be our God. I believe, with a perfect faith, that the Creator, blessed be his name, is the only object of adoration, and that no other being whatever ought to be worshipped.\* If the Jews had a peculiar mission, it was the preservation of the great doctrine of the unity of the one God, the Lord God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth; pardoning, iniquity, transgression, and sin; and whatever other faults the Jewish people may have been guilty of; however much, some of their writers may have imparted to the character of the Deity, the sanguinary warlike character which that age associated with its ideas of greatness, I feel free to confess my opinion, that their mission to preserve and transmit to the world the great monotheistic idea of worship, the unity of God, has been faithfully fulfilled by them, and that they have imparted to the future nations which have occupied, and may continue to occupy the succeeding ages, this doctrine of doctrines, unmutilated and unimpaired.

Children of an ancient and despised race, and ye the guardians (if your spirits hear my call) of the great idea which shall at length be the faith of the world!—accept my thanks for the fidelity with which you have recorded and transmitted to mankind the great truth, that God is one.

\* Allen's Modern Judaism, p. 52, as quoted by Harris.

I cannot join in the unmitigated abuse poured upon you from all sides. That ye shared in the evil passions and vices of the ages in which ye lived, that ye were unfaithful to the light ye had, the high religious and moral powers with which ye were endowed, is to my mind mournfully plain. But what people (if the pure are to be your executioners) dare cast upon you for these things, the first stone. I drop a tear over your national faults and infirmities, and weep with the children of Judah ; while I pour out my gratitude for all the blessings which I have received from you. In your histories, your biographies, and in the sayings of your sages ; though I view not unmixed error, but on the contrary, many things which the progress of science, and the advancement of human knowledge will disprove for ever ; yet there is in them many a charm—many a lovely truth instantly recognized by a light within us ; oftentimes have my dark and desponding days been illumined and cheered, my fainting hopes revived, and my trust in the Divine guardianship, strengthened from those pages. To you was entrusted the momentous truth that God is one. I bless you and your children, that amidst surrounding Polytheism, amidst Pagan myths and metaphysics, bewildering philosophies falsely so called, and the mysterious theories of heathens and Christians, you have as a people been the faithful guardians of that great truth ;—the simple unity of the Divine Being.

## LETTER II.

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY NOT TAUGHT BY CHRIST.

SIR,—Is a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity essential to salvation? Orthodox Christendom (so called) replies, Yes. Was Christ divinely commissioned to teach men the way of salvation? Again the answer is, Yes. But who is there that will dare to assert, and undertake to prove the assertion, that Christ taught the doctrine of the Trinity in unity; and that he taught it, not merely as a salutary matter of belief, but as an essential to salvation? For *both* must be proved; it must be shown not only that he taught the doctrine, but that he taught it as a *necessary* article of human belief, without which a man would perish everlastingly. But can this be proved? Who can show that Christ ever taught the doctrine at all; much less as a requisite of man's acceptance with God? Yet if Christ be the authorized revealer of the divine will as to the requisites of salvation, and if he never taught this doctrine, and that the belief of it was necessary to salvation; it plainly follows that the belief of it is *not* essential to man's acceptance with his Maker, or to his present or future spiritual safety. If I know any thing about logic, this is a logical conclusion, from premises which will hardly be questioned on Christian ground. Now the proof of this fact, rests upon Trinitarians; it is for them to show that Christ taught a Trinity in unity as a *requisite* of human belief; if they cannot do this, and if at the same time they allow Christ to be the revealer of the divine will; man's guide to happiness and heaven; 'the way, the truth, and the life;' then what becomes of the importance attached to the doctrine in church creeds? It sinks into nothing—as a matter of *fact*, the Trinity in Unity may, or may not exist; but what I ask becomes of the great *stress* laid upon the belief of it by the Orthodox, if Jesus, the divinely authorized expounder and teacher of human faith and morals, never taught the doctrine as a *sine qua non* of our final safety. There has not

been to my knowledge one single Trinitarian divine who has ever had the hardihood to assert, that Jesus *plainly* and in *express words* taught the doctrine of three persons in one Godhead, and that a belief of this *must* be cherished by every one; if, however, he taught it at all, and if it was a truth of such essential importance to man, he ought in my humble judgment to have taught it *plainly* and expressly, without leaving any thing to inferences from dark and ambiguous sentences, which thousands who have diligently studied his sayings, and whose temporal prospects and peace in this world, at all events, would have been much enhanced if they had discovered them, have never been able to see or to deduce. The plain truth is, that Christ never taught such a doctrine. \* He takes up as his leading truth the great doctrine of Judaism, the unity of God, whom he represents as the Father of all mankind, the God of mercy and of love. 'Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, or Jehovah our God, is one Jehovah.'—Mark xii. 'He declares that this same Jehovah, the Father, is *his* God and our God.'—John viii. 40. He owns his dependence upon this God.

1. FOR POWER. 'I can of myself do nothing.'—John v. 30. 'I cast out devils by the spirit of God.'—Matt. xii. 28.' To sit on my right hand, and my left, is not mine to give, but to those for whom it is prepared of my Father.'—Mark x. 37—40. 'Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.'—Matt. vi. 13. I honor *my Father*, and ye do dishonor me.'—John viii. 49, 50. 'The Father hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man.'—John v. 26, 27.

2. FOR KNOWLEDGE, and for the truths of his mission. 'My doctrine is not mine, but his that *sent* me.'—John xiv. 24. 'The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who *sent* me.'—John viii. 26—28. The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath *anointed* me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath *sent* me to preach deliverance to the captives, &c.'—Luke iv. 18, 19. And he stated the limitation of his knowledge as to the precise time of the Jewish judgments, 'Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, neither *the Son*, but the Father.'—Mark xiii. 32. And declared Acts i. 7, 'That the times and seasons, the Father kept in his own power.'

‘I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.’—John xvii. 4.

To God he owns submission, and of him he solicits aid. ‘My Father is greater than I.’—John x. 39. ‘I seek not my own will, but the will of him that sent me.’—John v. 30. ‘I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth.’—Luke x. 21. ‘Now is my soul troubled; Father, *save me* from this hour.’—John xii. 27. These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to *heaven* and said: ‘Father, the hour is come, glorify thy son, that thy son may glorify thee.’ ‘O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as *I will*, but as *thou wilt*.’—Matt. xxvi. 39. And his expiring petitions to his Father and our Father, his God and our God are—‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.’ ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

In defiance however of these, and numerous other passages, the position that Christ is God is still dogmatically maintained. In the Evangelical Records we have the history of a Being, passing through the weakness of childhood, enduring temptation, hunger, destitution, and sorrow; struggling with mental anguish, and fainting under the prospect of death; possessing the mission to communicate a regenerating faith, yet referring the source of his power and knowledge constantly to God the Father; to whom he prays, and upon whom he relies for aid, amidst suffering and sorrow, in devout reverence and submission—yet in the midst of facts so powerful and overwhelming, men are excommunicated from the pale of Christian churches; refused the name of Christian; subject to reproaches and scorn, and often denied the common civilities of life, because they will not in the face of evidence so strong, swallow the monstrous proposition that this same Jesus, was himself that very Deity whom he worshipped; that Supreme and Eternal God upon whom he alleged himself to be dependent.

I told you in my first letter, that many Trinitarian divines had stated, that the doctrine of the Trinity had been concealed from the Jews; a confession forced upon them by the absence of Trinitarianism from the Old Testament. The want of it in the teachings of Jesus Christ has also been frequently acknowledged, and some very ingenious and amusing endeavours were made to account for its absence by the ancient Fathers. Most of the Fathers allow that

Christ did not teach the doctrine of his Deity and Incarnation; some of them allege that this silence was necessary, and that the Jews could not have been brought round to the faith, if these doctrines had not been kept back for a while; which seems singular if, as some Trinitarians say, the whole Jewish Scriptures were intended to prefigure the doctrine. Ignatius, however, threw out an excellent hint, viz. that the secrecy was a 'trick' upon the devil; and this was thought such a capital idea that it was caught up by succeeding writers, and held up as a most profound piece of wisdom;—a regular discovery. Ignatius, Jerome, and others state, that if it had got out the devil would have defeated the whole plan. Alphonso Salmeron acknowledges that Christ received no testimony to his Deity from the Evangelists. To me it seems not only reasonable, but requisite, if Christ was the authorized expounder of the divine will, that he should teach us what was necessary to salvation; and if a belief of this doctrine of a Trinity be essential, of course he should have taught it. Yet Dr. Langley, Bishop of Ripon, [rather puzzled no doubt about its absence from Christ's teachings,] declares it is quite 'unreasonable to expect this revelation until the day of Pentecost;' and then another good Trinitarian Church of England Divine (G. Townsend) contradicts Bishop Langley, and says that we are *not* to regard the Epistles of the Apostles *as communications of religious doctrines not disclosed before*; as displaying the perfection of a system, of which merely the rude elements had been indicated in the writings of the four Evangelists. Hampden says: 'No one perhaps will maintain that there is any NEW TRUTH of Christianity set forth in the Epistles; any truth I mean (he says) which does not presuppose the whole truth of human salvation by Jesus Christ, as already determined and complete.' Having therefore had the four Evangelists and the Epistles taken from under us, by Trinitarians themselves, we are left to the book called the Acts of the Apostles, and the apostolic sermons there contained for testimonies in favor of the Trinity; but in them is a silence on the subject of that doctrine, if possible, still more profound and complete. The apostolic sermons are amongst the plainest testimonies to the supremacy of God the Father, and the humanity of Christ. 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by many mighty miracles, which God did

by him.'—Acts ii. 22. 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. Him God raised up, &c.'

'God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained.'—Acts xvii. 30, 31. Let all the house of Israel know most assuredly, that God *hath made* this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'—Acts ii. 36. 'Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed, and word before *God* and all the people.' Consult their sermons and discourses generally, as recorded in several parts of the Acts of the Apostles. I well remember, some time ago, being strongly impressed whilst reading the 2nd and 10th chapters of Acts, and being struck with the plain evidence afforded of Peter's belief in the simple humanity of the Saviour, a curiosity seized me to ascertain what Mr. Wesley, in his notes upon the passages, might say to so palpable a proof. I referred to my copy of Wesley's notes on the New Testament, and amongst those under the sermons in question, I found that he omitted all comment upon the 22nd verse of the 2nd chapter; and that upon the 38th verse of the 10th chapter, he says: 'Peter speaks *sparingly* here of the majesty of Christ, as considering the state of his hearers.' I was amused at the word *sparingly*; coming from such a quarter, it spoke volumes.

We shall upon searching the Old and New Testament find that there is such a total silence upon the subject of the theory of the Trinity in those documents, that no man of ordinary common sense, without knowledge of such a doctrine, would I venture to assert, find it there, or any thing from which it might be inferred, from the 1st chapter of Genesis to the last in Revelations. The sacred writings, taken altogether, amount to a series of testimonies to the unity and supremacy of one God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and no plan can be adopted to force the doctrine of the Trinity out of them which does not presuppose a previous reception of the doctrine from other sources in the mind of the enquirer, and a preference for ambiguities which favor the use of the fluctuating ideal conjectures, and ingenious hair-splitting processes of verbal criticism, over every plain and sensible method of treating an ordinary book.

I have shown you that many Trinitarians acknowledge that the doctrine in dispute was not revealed in the Jewish Scriptures, and that others acknowledge it was not revealed by Christ. I have only further to add, that a large and increasing class of divines in the Church of England, usually called Puseyite, or High Church, have united their testimony in addition to the aforegoing, and to the best Roman Catholic scholars that no such doctrine as that of the Trinity is in either the Old or New Testament; but that we are indebted to Church Tradition for it. Hence they seek to exalt the importance of tradition.

Newman says: 'I believe the most accurate considerations of the subject will lead us to acquiesce in the statement as a general truth, that the doctrines in question [that is of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Atonement,] have never been learnt from Scripture. Surely the sacred volume was never intended, and was not adapted to teach our creed.'

Keble says: 'Not a few fragments yet remain, very precious and sacred fragments of the unwritten teaching of the first age of the Church:' and he adds, 'above all the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity is an ascertainable part of the primitive *unwritten* system.' [See Primitive Tradition recognized in Scripture, page 32.] In the same work he says, 'We, that is all of the Anglican Church, who have had any training in theology, are so early taught to trace the creed in the Scriptures, and to refer at once certain portions of both Testaments, to certain high mysteries of the Catholic faith, that it commonly appears to ourselves, as though we had learned those mysteries directly from the Scriptures. But there are few surely, who on careful recollection would not be compelled to acknowledge that the creed, or some catechetical instruction, had prepossessed them with these truths before ever they thought of proving them from holy writ.' Even the Nicene creed, he says, had its 'origin in tradition.' And surely enough it is a fact, that the doctrine in question is one of tradition, and it will be the object of my succeeding letters, and indeed it is the main object of my writing the series to trace this tradition, and to show that it did not *originate* in the Christian Church, but within the dreary confines of Paganism; amidst the dismal and corrupting idolatries which at one time almost overspread the earth.



### LETTER III.

#### TRINITIES IN PAGAN MYTHOLOGY AND TRADITION.

SIR,—Having in my former letters to you, spoken of the silence of the Jewish records, and of the teachings of Christ in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity; I now proceed to the investigation of Pagan mythology and tradition.

The worship of the elements and powers of nature, with other causes of which I shall speak more fully in the sequel, led, in all probability, to the superstitious reverence which many ancient nations paid to numbers. Seven is the number of the planets, (including sun and moon) according to the ancient notion; twelve, the changes of the moon in a year; thirty, the approximate number of days in a lunation. To all these numbers and others produced by their combination, a mysterious virtue has been attached.\* The triplicity observable in natural phenomena and other causes, served to invest the number three also, with a similar superstitious veneration. Hence in ancient history, traditions, and legends, and also in mythology, seven, three, with their combinations are generally adopted in preference to others, where the selection (as in mythic history) was arbitrary. This veneration for numbers has not been confined to ancient times, but seems to appear in combination with superstition, as a faithful attendant, close to our own day. Numbers, still add an air of the supernatural to traditions scarcely dead. We remember well enough, the *thrice* manifested Ghost; the dream ominously true, *thrice* repeated in the same night, the prophetic declaration *thrice* solemnly uttered by some mysterious stranger, which gave such a shew of the marvellous, and surrounded with terror, the tales of a Grandfather. In investigating ancient mythology and history, you will observe the deference paid to certain numbers. We shall now proceed briefly to notice, the preference given to the number three in several Pagan religions; and having clearly traced, as I am persuaded will be done, Tri-

\* See Kenrick on Primæval History, p. 156.

nitarianism to a Pagan origin, we shall follow it in its wanderings through India and other places to Egypt, and thence through Grecian Plato and his followers, into the Christian Church.

1. *Indian Mythology*.—The principal Indian deities were arranged in threes, and represented in three form combination. They are worshipped, however, under different epithets, and are known by different names ; sometimes as Brahma, Vishna, or Vischnoo, and Siva, then as Bhur, Bhuvah, and Swar. The Vishna says, ‘The Gods are one and three, Fire, Air, and Sun ; their names are Bhur, Bhuvah, and Swar.’

The Hindoo triad, according to Bahr, is that out of the great Es, or Parabrahm, who is without number and form, proceeds the Trimurti, or union of the three powers : Brahma, the Creator ; Vischnoo, the Preserver ; and Siva, the destroyer, changer, or restorer. The conception is to account for nature, and the three great processes observable there, of creation, preservation, and of transmutation, change, or regeneration. These deified powers are represented in a triplicate image. The first Brahma, or Creator, is not much worshipped ; fear or interest operating upon dark minds, has naturally led to an adoration of the other two powers, representing preservation, and destruction or change. Some, worship principally one, and some the other, of the two last mentioned, and are thus divided into two great religious sects. The Buddhists have a Trinity, viz. Buddhas, the revealer ; Dharmas, the revealed word ; Janghas, the flock of believers. The Indian veneration for three is not confined to mythology, but is extended to their geography and other branches of knowledge. The world, according to their notions, is in three great provinces.

Numerous gross and debasing superstitions mingled themselves with the original mythology of India, and numberless incarnations and demigods afterwards appear in it. It seems primarily, however, to have been a simple and symbolical theology. A very excellent writer, and one apparently intimately acquainted with the Indian religion, (the author of the *Arabs in Spain*,) says of it, ‘It wants the magic of Chaldea, the brilliancy of Persia, the splendour of Arabia, and the *real* materialism of Judea ; but its creeds, though mystified, may be explained, and when

explained will be found to contain the simple truths of nature amplified by a high, though speculative philosophy ; for under the names of Brahma, Vishnoo, and Seeva (the Creator, cherisher, and destroyer), the Brahmin *worshipped one God, and two causes, the sun and time*—the former was loved as the preserver of all nature ; the latter was feared and propitiated as a destroyer. The symbols of their worship were found to be the bodily representations of these things. The priesthood has mystified the simplest, and darkened the least clear portions of these doctrines, till it has thus added no inconsiderable load of folly and superstition. But the priests of Brahma are surely not singular, nor can we allow ourselves to deny the philosophy, because we may be disgusted with the visible forms of a religion.'

2. *The Persian Mythology.*—The various accounts given of this theology are by no means very consistent or satisfactory. To two of their chief Deities, however, Ormuzd or Oromusdes (representing goodness and the original light), and Ahriman (the representative of physical darkness and moral evil) is added another Mithra ; who represents, as some think, the created light of heavenly bodies. This God Mithra occupied a sort of mediatorial position according to some writers. To each of these, occasionally, a threefold character was given. To Ahriman alone was sometimes ascribed preservation, change, and destruction. The most antient Persian mythology is represented by another writer to be, that from the great God, the Eternal, came forth two spirits ; one the agent of good, called Ormuzd ; and the other the agent of evil, called Ahriman. In the old Persian mythology, we observe a strong coincidence with that of India ; for in the latter, Brahma, the great Essentia, creates two principles—Vishnoo, the sun or genial enriching influences, and Seeva, destroying influences.

3. *Babylon.*—The Babylonian Gods were twelve in number ; placed in subdivisions, in which a preference was given to a threefold classification. Tauthe, their Divinity, has a wife Apason ; these have a son, 'The only begotten,' called Aoymis, who is the intelligent world ; from these arose another offspring, Dache and Dachos ; thence also a third, Kissare and Assoros ; from whom there were born three others, Anos, Illinos, and Aos. Of Aos and Dache was born a son, *Belos*, or Bel (The Sun), whom they called Demiurgos or Creator. The numbers of these twelve

powers were, as Movers thinks, determined by the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The term 'only begotten,' used in this mythology, is worthy of notice, and affords a clue to the phraseology of a later period.\*

The same mythology extended in a modified form to other parts of Asia. Bel, with Tauthe and Apason, is the Sidonian Trinity. Apason is called Pothos (desire) in the Phœnician Trinity, of whom Chronos (the unknown God or Chaos) begets Omiklé, the Creator. In other words, according to Sanchoniatho, Chaos, called also spirit, becomes enamoured of its own principles, and by Pothos (desire) produce offspring, Mot or Omiklé, the author of the universe.

Bel, or Baal, also was a threefold Divinity, and like the Sun his representative; and after the manner of the Hindoo Trinity, and the Persian Ahriman, had producing, supporting, and destroying functions.

The oracles of Zoroaster are said to contain the genuine records of the Sabœan theology, which spread from the east to the shores of the Mediterranean sea. I strongly suspect that these oracles have received from their translators a strong infusion of the sentiments of the Greek philosophers. Their language, in many respects, strikingly betrays them. However, as they are thought by many very learned persons, to give a pretty fair account of this mythology, I will give an extract or two.

'Where the Paternal Monad is, that Paternal Monad amplifies itself and generates a duality.'

'On the whole world shines the Triad over which the Monad rules.' 'In the Triad appeared wisdom, virtue, and wisest truth.' 'Under two minds is contained the life generating fountain of souls; and the artificer who *self-operating* formed the world—he who sprung out of that mind.'

4. *Egyptian Mythology*.—Wilkinson states, in his *Manners and Customs of the ancient Egyptians* (iv. 185, 231) 'That the great Gods of the Egyptians were Neph (or Cneph), Amur (or Amour), Pthah, Khem, Sate, Maut. or Buto, Bubastes, and Neith; one of whom generally formed in conjunction with the other two a triad, which was worshipped by a particular city or district, with peculiar veneration. In these triads, the third member proceeded from the other two; that is from the first by the second—

\* See Dr. Beard's *Illustrations of Trinitarianism*.

thus the intellect of the Deity, having operated upon matter, produced as the result of these two (i. e. of the divine intelligence operating upon matter) under the form and name of the world or created things, called by the Greek Kosmos, and on a similar principle appear to have been formed most of these speculative combinations.

In some provinces they affirmed that Osiris was the parent of all, the primordial source. That Cneph produced Phtha the allurer, and these two, with Osiris, composed the triad in some places. Osiris (which means enriching influences) was represented by the sun, and the name applied also to the Nile; Cneph to the wind, atmosphere, or soul of the world animating or pervading the whole; and Ptha was applied to the fire.

According to Champollion, Amounra is the Supreme Being, self produced, he is at first perfect, containing both male and female, and every other relation in himself. He develops himself so as to separate the male from the female part, and upon the female part (Mout) he begets a son, Chons. This according to Champollion, the *primary*, four of the entire Egyptian mythology, viz. the Trinity of Amoun, Mout, and Chons; this triad passing through numberless intermediate triads, at last incarnates on earth in the form of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Though this was the primary form of the mythology, each separate province worshipped the triad under different names; all however involving more or less of the same idea; as each province differed in its triad, so it probably differed in its theory of the Gods. According to Eusebius (Preparatio iii. 11, and this was perhaps the great mystery taught) 'the first creative act was the issuing of an egg from the mouth of Amoun Chnouphis, whilst a monad, that is, before the separation of his male and female halves. This egg produced a Deity, called by them Ptha, and by the Greeks Hephæstos. He was distinguished by a dress which enveloped both his feet, like the winding sheet of a dead body. Ptha was the creative agent of the universe, the divine intelligence who at the beginning was sent forth by the Supreme Being to create all things; he was also honored as the inventor of philosophy. He was the primordial form of the third part of the grand triad. If we follow him through his first emanation or descent in the Theban triad, Amoun, Neith, and Chonsis (the last mentioned being Ptha) we find him with

the same dress and symbols, but with a thick lock of hair platted over his right ear, which was a part of the costume of royal youths in Egypt. His head is surmounted by an ornament, representing two of the phases of the moon, the crescent, and the gibbous moon, denoting that in this his first transfiguration he had a mythological relation with that luminary. From this point he descends downwards to his divine incarnation on earth in Horus. He also has other incarnations, and in his final one he is said to have taught mankind all the arts that distinguish them from brutes; beginning with that of speaking, and proceeding with writing, the practice of religion, &c. The Ibis-headed Thoth, one of their Deities, is always an emanation from Ptha, the first-born of the primordial Deity, and according to reliefs discovered by Champollion in the temple of Dakkeh, in Nubia, again ascended to heaven through three intermediate forms, (one of which was logos, the word or wisdom), again to be absorbed in the Supreme God, under his loftiest manifestation of Har-hat, the celestial Son or wisdom of God. You are here I doubt not beginning to perceive a very strong resemblance to modern notions of Trinities and incarnations, and feel ready to ask in this stage of the investigation, whether it was not from this that the last mentioned notions originated. So plain indeed is the resemblance that a writer for the Religious Tract Society, in one of their publications (*The Antiquities of Egypt*) together with Kidd and others, have positively taken up the subject, to prove that the doctrine of the Christian Trinity must have been revealed to the Egyptian priesthood; and that an expectation that the Son God would become incarnate had been given them from on High, in their own mythology, as preparatory inspiration for Christianity. We perceive here at all events that the Trinity, more or less distinctly seen in the other eastern religions, is in the Egyptian mythology, with its attendant ideas of incarnations fully developed. The Grecian mythology was in part formed from the Egyptian, with numberless additions of Gods, demi-gods, and deified heroes. I must, however, now close this long letter, and proceed in my next to make some reflections upon these strange ideas in the heathen religions, and then to show how the Pagan ideas of Trinities, begettings, incarnations, and emanations crept into the Christian church.

## LETTER IV.

### OBSERVATIONS ON PAGAN RELIGIONS.

SIR,—A theory was broached by Bryant, and followed to a certain extent by Sir Wm. Jones, that the triads prevalent in the ancient religions of the East, and amidst tribes and nations who owe their rise, or their imperfect civilization to emigrations from the east, had their origin in the tradition respecting the Patriarchs—and had reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or to Shem, Ham, and Japhet, the three sons of Noah, to whom Hebrew records ascribe the population of the whole earth. Howitt, in his history of Priestcraft, also seems to acquiesce in the same opinion. He thinks that the eastern heathen mythologies had their origin in the corruptions of patriarchal worship before the dispersion of Babel. There, he says, 'The whole family of man was collected in the descendants of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet; and thence at that time they were scattered abroad by the hand of God over the world.' After stating that Japhet colonized the whole of Europe and the northern regions, called Tartary and Siberia—that the posterity of Shem peopled Southern Asia—and that Ham, though at first mixed with Shem in Southern Asia, afterwards became the sole occupant of Africa, he then adds as follows: 'But before they were thus scattered, they had corrupted the religious doctrines they had received from the great progenitor Noah; or rather had set them aside, in order to deify Noah and his three sons, whom they had come to regard as a re-appearance of Adam and his three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth. The singular coincidence of circumstances between Adam and Noah, forced this upon their imaginations. Adam, the first man, and Father of the first world; and Noah, the first man, and Father of the second world, had each three sons conspicuous in history; and of these three one in each case was a bad one, Cain and Ham. Led by this to consider the second family, but an avater of the first, they regarded them as immortal and worshipped

them. Hence we have in all Pagan mythologies a triad of principal Gods.'

A theory like this seems plausible enough at first sight ; but on a more close examination of Pagan myths, it becomes increasingly improbable and insufficient *of itself* to account satisfactorily for the origin and developement of mythology.

It appears to me unlikely, without a very serious extension of the Hebrew chronology, that the *whole* of the inhabitants of the world should have been reduced to the children of Noah, and the whole earth re-peopled by them, when we find evidence in history, and even in the Old Testament of populous kingdoms flourishing in an advanced state of civilization within a very short time from the alleged event. Independent of the high improbability of such a rapid increase of population as would be necessary, if the entire earth had been deluged, the surface must have presented most extraordinary obstacles to the plans of agriculture, commerce, and civilization, and society would have to retrace all its steps from that of a single family to civilized empires in this incredibly short space of time. Without dwelling upon this difficulty which attends the theory, I would remark, that an examination of Pagan religions brings me to the conclusion that their theories of the Gods was not the result of the operation of a *single* cause, but of many causes. Numerous emotions and desires of the human mind, in an incipient state of culture, and a variety of circumstances connected with the early history of nations, contributed to the erection of their several mythological fabrics. Man undoubtedly possesses an indestructible religious instinct as part of his nature ; a feeling of dependence upon some supreme cause, and an intimation of and longing for a future destiny ; but perhaps the reason of his first efforts to construct a theory on the subject of the operations and nature of the Deity, was his desire to account for the origin and phenomena of the universe ; and afterwards to resolve certain problems connected with physical evil, and with moral good and evil, in all their ramifications. In giving form to his ideas on these subjects, at a time when the reasoning and moral powers were in a low condition, men personified and deified the powers and operations of nature, and occasionally the various appearances both of the



physical and moral world, in the explanation of which they generally made use of the phenomena of generation.

In the first stage of human progress, when the feeling of dependence upon, and relation to some unseen cause and guardianship stirred within minds ill-developed in the intellectual, reflective, and moral powers; when animalism and sensation prevailed over the higher parts of men's minds, they saw the Deity of their instinct in the common objects of nature—beasts, images, stones, mountains, and stars became types of God. But man was not long content with this; as the intellectual and reflective parts began to expand, he sought to inquire into the causes of things, and attempted to explain the origin of the universe. The analogies of his own condition, and that of the animals, led him to apply the idea of generation, in solving the problems which perplexed his mind. Life and its reproduction, preservation, and transition every where pressed upon his attention; and he added to his personification of nature and her laws, the ideas of male and female, to whose union he attributed the creation and renewal of the world. Hence the idea of generation (father, mother, and child) naturally led the early theories to assume a threefold form or classification. The sun with his enriching influences, the earth receiving those influences, and yielding by their aid from her fertile womb countless productions; water, fire, air, light, darkness, all seeming to man to bear the most important relation to the great theatre in which he was placed, drew his attention. Each of these was personified, to each the whim of generation was applied; and under the aspect of male, female, and offspring they were interwoven into mythology. The opposite tendencies observable in many of the laws of nature, led to similar views of the deities, under whose control these laws were placed; as the constructive, poetic, and artistic talents were brought out in man, these ideas were poetically and artistically embodied; and shrines, temples, rites, priesthoods arose, with all the paraphernalia of an organized polytheism. While the tendency to explain the appearances of nature led to element worship, another desire sprung up with the growth of the mind, and was equally restless. Man sought not only to solve *natural*, but *moral* problems; he undoubtedly wished to account for nature, and her sometimes apparently opposite laws; but he also sought to explain the source and opera-

tions of moral good and evil. The appearances of men of extraordinary valour, wisdom, or virtue, who figured as warriors, legislators, or sages, led (as a result of the last mentioned tendency) to their deification; and mental, as well as material power, became an idol. Some of the Gods were thought to have descended in human form; or to have by some generative process sent forth an emanation, which became embodied in the individual in question; such men were deemed a mixture of human and divine; held to have been born miraculously; supported by superhuman power, and mediators for the race. Hence the doctrines of incarnations, processions, and emanations, which play so conspicuous a part in the old religions. Some of their Gods were alleged to have incarnated several times in men distinguished as warriors, teachers of arts and sciences, or religion. To all the arts of life were assigned peculiar deities. Phœbus Apollo, inspires the poet and artist. Thor and Mars excite to war and rule its destinies. A God presides over the plough, the anvil, and the pastoral crook. The struggles between good and evil pervading human life, and between conflicting forces in nature, led virtue and vice to be placed also under the dominion of separate Gods; one benevolent, a cherisher and sustainer—the other, dark and malignant, a destroyer and changer. In their mythologies appear the wars and struggles between these opposing deities. Typhon, in Egyptian, and Ahreman, in the Zoroastrian mythology, are the Gods of physical and moral evil. The Titans, agents of evil, in the Grecian religion, war with the Gods, and are cast down and imprisoned in Tartarus—Typhon, in Egypt, is vanquished by Horus, and buried in a bog. Vishnoo became incarnate to oppose physical and moral ills. Ahreman contests with Ormuzd—the evil one is fettered, and though he still fights he will ultimately be overthrown. The Gods of good and evil were supposed to be emanations or offspring of the great primal source. The common notions about Satan originate in the same way, viz. from the desire to attribute moral and physical evil to the operations of a malignant spiritual Being. Most Christian Divines, so called, believe in the existence of a devil; and imagine such credulity almost as important as the belief in a God. The doctrine is a disgrace to the Christian church.

Many writers have in my opinion greatly erred in endea-

vouring to refer the whole structure of the ancient religions to one source. Some to element worship alone—some solely to the worship and the deification of great men—others (as Bryant, &c.) to a scriptural theory in traditions of the Patriarchs—others altogether to the allegorical view. The entire fabric of a national religion is owing, however, not to one, but to several of these causes. A people's religion, like their history, their manners and customs, their laws and institutions are the result of *many* feelings and operations of their gradually expanding minds, and of many events and circumstances in their history. I refer here, of course to the whole fabric of a national mythology, for I doubt not that you will have observed how plainly and simply the triple or Trinitarian theory of God's manifestations arose, from the marked triplicity of generation of human and animal life, which they brought forward to explain the origin of all other energies and existences. Many other things would favor this superstitious reverence for three—creation, preservation, destruction or change. Life (primal and absolute), birth, and death; matter, form, energy, and other three-form divisions, in which nature and her laws seemed to be arranged, all tended to support the preference.

In concluding this letter, I would observe that the world appears to be constituted upon the principle of slow and progressive improvement. Man is individually, and in the race, progressive. The full manifestation of his moral and intellectual greatness requires the time and experience of ages; but however slow, sometimes imperceptibly slow, the work goes on, it proceeds steadily and surely. In a certain stage of his advancement, in the dawn of his powers (and the race is but still in its infancy) he seems unable to grasp the truth without the aid of gross and material symbols. He walks at first, mentally as well as bodily, with such aids as he can procure; tottering and displaying his feebleness at every step. Pity his weakness, and have faith in his advancing strength and maturity. By and by he will walk like a man.

## LETTER V.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF GREECE AND ALEXANDRIA.

SIR,—Having stated to you briefly some of the chief views embodied in the antient religions of the east, I shall give you in this letter, with equal brevity, the views of some ancient philosophers, in whose teachings something approximating to the ancient Trinitarian ideas is visible, and who form the connecting link between the theories of Pagans and Christian divines on this subject. You will see shortly how the gross ideas of the ancient heathens pass through the mystic regions of speculative philosophy, and at length mingle themselves with the simple and sublime doctrines of Christ; acquiring ultimately in the Christian church, all the dogmatic form and permanence which ecclesiastical authority and tyranny can confer.

Plato, one of the most eminent of the Greek philosophers, was among the wisest men of which antiquity can boast. He had ideas of God far in advance of the religious notions of his day. He was one of the moral and intellectual instruments that appear in the fulness of time to aid in tearing down prevailing superstitions. Amidst polytheism, gross and complicated, he sought for *unity* both amongst matter and ideas. 'What ideas were to Phenomena, God was to Ideas, the last result of generalization. God was (according to Plato) the one Being, comprising within himself all other Beings, the cause of all things celestial and terrestrial. God (says Plato) '*persuaded* necessity to become stable, harmonious, and fashioned according to beauty.' Yes, *persuaded*, is Plato's word: for there are two eternal principles, necessity and intelligence, and from the mixture of these the world was made; but intelligence persuaded (or influenced) necessity to be fashioned according to beauty.\* Plato cut the dispute about evil very short by his logical principle,—that since there was a good, there must *necessarily* be the contrary of good, viz. evil. Plato viewed evil or imperfection

\* See Lewes Biographical History of Philosophy.

as inherent in matter or the world, and the conflict between good and evil as merely a necessary result of intelligence operating upon matter, and subjecting it to intelligent laws. In other words, evil is the scum, the dross, which arises and is to be cast away in the refining process; as intelligence, as the divine energy, love, and ideas become realized, and predominate over material, sensual nature, the evil will disappear. Perhaps these doctrines of Plato contain the elements of the real truth respecting evil\*. Our main object is, however, to point out in what respect Plato's philosophy embodied the views of triplicity observable in the ancient religions of the east. The first passage I shall cite, shews how the old theories, explaining things according to the analogies of generation still existed. 'There are three things to be distinguished; the thing produced, that *in* which it is produced, and that *from* which it was produced, and from which it took its likeness. To use a comparison we may call that which receives, the *mother*; that from which it was derived, the *Father*; and the *offspring* between them in nature. 'Much has been said concerning the platonic logos; but if by this be meant, a person distinct from the being whose logos it is, we must not look for it in the writings of Plato himself, but in those of his followers. According to Plato, logos has only two acceptances, viz. those of speech and of reason, such as is found in man. Having spoken of one logos as infirm and standing in need of assistance, he says, 'There is another logos, the natural brother of this, much better, and more powerful, viz. that which is written with knowledge in the mind of the learner, able to help itself, knowing with whom to speak, and with whom to be silent. *Phæd.* You mean the living and animated logos of an intelligent person, of which that which is written may be justly called the image.' *Phædrus*, p. 213. This is evidently a description of reason, as a faculty of the mind, and by no means of a person.†

Plato appears to conceive of the divine mind, as possessing certain ideas, from which ideas the pattern was formed of the visible world. This he calls the internal, invisible, or intellec-

\* This subject I hope to go more fully into, in my forthcoming letters, on the 'Agents of Evil.'

† Theo. Rep. iv. 81.

tual world, and which he contrasts with the outward visible universe of which it was the type.

After Plato, other schools of philosophy arose in Greece, one of which was the Sceptics. Pyrrho was the founder of this school. Struck with the devout faith in unusual doctrines in India; with the spectacle of a race of wise and studious men believing a strange and absurd creed, he was led to regard with scepticism all speculative doctrines. He insisted wholly on morality. He was resigned and tranquil, accepting life as he found it, and guiding himself by the general precepts of common sense. After him followed others, with more or less of the sceptical tendency—at length philosophy found no longer a home in Greece. I must now turn your attention from Greece to Alexandria, where philosophy next becomes a guest. This flourishing city became a centre of union for the religious and literary world; the Jewish doctor on the one hand, and the philosopher on the other; both seeking so to shape their doctrines as to make them show some consistency with the Egyptian theology, and palatable to the reigning powers. Now we have seen what the Egyptian theology was, with its Trinities and incarnations. Platonism, Judaism, Christianity, all must be taught, so as to show that the Egyptian priest had anticipated them all, and that the antient mythology was a preparatory step to a pure philosophy and a pure faith.

The conceptions of the genuine Platonists had not favored the idea, as we have already shown, of two proper divine persons. Their nous was merely a repository of ideas; their *logos* the faculty of reason and intellect. Neither the nous nor logos were taught to be persons. Philo, the Jew, was the first of what are called Neo-Platonists. He was born at Alexandria a few years before Christ. ‘The influence of Greek ideas was already felt in Alexandria; and Plato, commenting on the writings of the Jews, did so in the spirit of one deeply imbued with Greek thought. His genius was oriental, his education Greek; the result was a strange mixture of mysticism and dialectics. From the new academy in Greece he had been learned to distrust the truth of all sensuous knowledge, and to Plato he also owed much; but he had an oriental cast of mind most favorable to mysticism. ‘If human knowledge is a delusion, we must seek for

truth in some higher sphere. The senses may deceive; reason may be powerless; but there is still a faculty in man—there is faith. Real science is the gift of God; its name is Faith; its origin is the goodness of God; its cause is piety.' In this way he condemned reason for the sake of faith, forgetting that every sentiment and faculty of man's nature was intended to aid harmoniously, in the perfecting of his character, and in the investigation of truth. Man's perceptions, reasoning powers, his faith, veneration, benevolence, and every faculty, energy and power of his nature were to be in union in the work, as members of one body—unable to say, one to the other, I have no need of thee. But it was with Philo and the antient philosophers as it is in our own day; one man decries reason; another exalts the intellect, and neglects the monitions and tendencies of the instinctive and affectionate elements of the mind; both forgetting that man is a creature of superior instincts and affections, as well as of exalted intellect, and that the thorough investigation of truth of all kinds, and especially of those truths which concern our spiritual destiny must be the application and decision of our *whole* minds upon the whole matter.\*

The following outline of Philo's theology is given by Lewes: 'God is ineffable, incomprehensible; his existence may be known; his nature never can be known. But to know that he exists, is in itself the knowledge of his being one; perfect, simple, immutable, and without attribute \* \* \* We cannot penetrate with our glance the mystery of his essence; we can only believe. If, however, we cannot know God in his essence, we can obtain some knowledge of his Divinity; we know it in the word—The Logos.'

\* An instance of this one-sidedness I may mention. In reference to God himself; one person argues vehemently, that the idea of his existence is one of conception, purely instinctive; another that it must be proved by the argument from design; from the adaptability of things to their purposes and the various marks of contrivance, and benevolence apparent in nature, and so on. The truth, however is, that I am entitled to *both* proofs. Neither of them ought to be slighted. A universal instinct in man points to the supreme and eternal cause as his Maker and friend; the opening reason brings to him numerous proofs that the instinct is correct, and as his moral and intellectual powers expand, the conception of God first raised instinctively, becomes more certain, and more exalted and glorious. Why then should man not be allowed the aid of his *entire* powers, his *whole* nature in so solemn and important a study.

The logos, according to Philo, is God's thought; this thought is twofold; it is thought as embracing all ideas. 1. Thought as thought; 2. thought realized; (i. e.) thought become the world. In these three hypostases—The Divine Being, his logos, and his logos expressed and realized, we have the shadowy Trinity of Philo. He contemplates God as the absolute cause of all, revealing himself by his power and intelligence, called logos. Now logos might be viewed with a double aspect; 1. As intelligence or reason existing in the mind unuttered, and not manifested; 2. As thought expressed or embodied in words or works. In this double relation he contemplated the divine power and intelligence, the spirit of God. 1. As it exists in God. 2. As expressed in nature and revelation. He illustrates this in one place, by reference to an architect and building. Thus after observing, that 'An architect constructs a building, after an idea which he has previously formed in his own mind;' he adds, 'In like manner we must judge concerning God, who intending to build a magnificent city, first devised the plan of it, from which he formed the visible world. As the *preconceived plan* of the building in the *mind* of an architect has no existence externally, but is stamped upon the mind of the artist; in like manner this world of ideas has no place but the divine logos, which disposes all things. For what other place can there be to receive, and contain not only all ideas, but even a single idea. It is a world creating power, having its source in the *true Good*.' The 'True Good' is the platonic term for the Supreme Being, and the world creating *power* is the logos. Though these writers are very vague, and often apparently inconsistent, yet from such passages as these, and others similar, I cannot believe that Philo ever had any serious idea of the actual personality of the 'logos,' or word, which in my view he regards simply as the divine intelligence. The principle of the Egyptian and old mythological ideas of generation appear, though much refined, in these writers, yet sufficiently to show their taint from the Pagan source. Here are 1st. The Supreme. 2. Divine intelligence; from which, as male and female, comes the universe as offspring.

In some places, Philo speaks of the logos, as 'flowing from the Fountain of Wisdom as a river.' When allegorizing Moses' description of the High Priest, he says, 'This



High Priest does not mean a man, but the *logos* of God, free from all sin, voluntary and involuntary. When Moses forbids him to defile himself on account of his Father the *nous*, or his mother the *senses*, I think that he must have parents incorruptible and holy; his Father God, the Father of all, and his mother, wisdom; (the *logos*) by which every thing was produced.' Here again we have the Pagan basis of generation.

On other occasions Philo uses language of personification respecting the *logos*, or intelligence of the Deity. He states angels or divine messengers to be the *logos*. In the case of Moses, whose spirit God is said to take from him, in order to impart it to the seventy-two elders; he says, 'This is not to be understood as if he suffered any loss thereby, but it was like the lighting of one torch by another, which is not diminished thereby, though ten thousand be lighted by one fire.' Treating of the migration of Abraham, he says, 'He that follows God must of necessity make use of the attending *logoi*, which are commonly called angels.' Though Philo, therefore, *approaches* the direct personification of the *logos* more than the early Platonists, still one feels inclined to think from his various illustrations, that such personification was but rhetorical, and that he did not imagine that the *logos* was a real Being distinct from the Father, nor did he (apparently) think that the *logos* bore any different relation to the Messiah than to the prophets. Proclus, Plotinus, and others follow, whose works are a jumble of the most confused verbal subtleties; when you imagine you have perceived their meaning in one passage, you pass to another, which instantly represents the matter apparently in a different light. The writings of the schoolmen, so much ridiculed for subtlety, are daylight compared to them. Passage after passage might be quoted here, to show their strange and contradictory ideas respecting God, his *nous*, *logos*, &c.; but they would merely fill up my space without adding a particle of real information to the mind, except the lesson, which would be inculcated by the exhibition of men preferring jangling verbal distinctions to the sober deductions of the mind. The later Platonists, however, undoubtedly had a Trinity. God was according to them triple and yet one, containing within himself three Hypostases (substances, i. e. persons). The first was unity, not Being,

but unity. The second is intelligence. The third universal soul. In other words, 1. The perfect principle, the one which generates but is ungenerated. 2. The perfect generated, viz. intelligence (logos). 3. The soul of the world (Psyche), or the *manifested* intelligence. 'In the same way that goodness and unity, the properties of the self-existent God, were supposed to be superior to mind or wisdom, the second principle; so in its turn, intellect was supposed to be superior to the moving spirit or energy which carried ideas (i. e. the ideas of the logos) into action. The Monad or Supreme Unity, generated intellect, and intellect as containing the intelligible ideas or archetypes of all sensible things, generated soul, or the spirit of action.\* Hence the Trinity of the later Platonists was: 1. THE ONE GOOD; 2. Intelligence (logos or nous); 3. Energy operating (Psyche). THE FIRST in this Trinity being in Platonic language all things unitively; THE SECOND, all things intellectually; THE THIRD, all things productively. The common sense lying at the bottom of all this wordy philosophy seems to me to be simply this: THAT THE SUPREME CAUSE (THE ONE GOOD), BY HIS WISDOM, POWER, AND INTELLECT (LOGOS OR NOUS) INFUSES OR DISPERSES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD THOSE LAWS AND ENERGIES (PYSCHÉ) WHICH ACT UPON, AND GIVE FORM, VITALITY, AND REGENERATIVE FORCE TO NATURE, AND WHICH ARE THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF ALL PHENOMENA.

Man, in an imperfect state of culture, with the predominance of the sensual over the moral and intellectual nature on the one hand; on the other hand, philosophers, in the dawn of intelligence, with few sound inductive principles and strong metaphysical tendencies, unable to see the truth without symbolic form, embodied the simple view of God last stated, either under the sensual images of the more ancient Paganisms, or clothed with verbal subtleties, and in all the allegorical fancies of a morbidly mystic, and imaginative intellect. The absurd personifications they make of the divine spirit and operations, though often apparently only rhetorical; the generative analogies of the old superstitions which still occupy their minds, and give an evident tinge to their reasonings; their desire to keep the

\* Thom,

great first cause and unity from contact with matter (which they thought evil) and numbers (which they deemed imperfect) led them to regard and speak of the powers of God as emanations from him by process of generation, and these powers in process of time were regarded as distinct and separate persons. Thus a transition was formed from Primæval Paganism to Trinitarianism; and Amounra, of Egypt, and Brahma, of India, with their families, in the philosophic garb of the Platonists, entered the church to displace the God of love of Jesus, and his spirit of holiness and of truth.

## LETTER VI.

### UNION OF PAGAN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY, WITH CHRISTIANITY.

SIR,—My last letter brought you to the prevailing modes of thought, about the time when the Gospel entered the domains of Gentile Philosophy. The purer Platonists had no belief in three co-equal Gods, each possessing the fullness of the Deity, and yet one. They merely personified the divine attributes. The later Platonists did this less purely than the earlier, and ultimately use a language, which, whatever were their own opinions, pointed toward the idea of two Gods, one of whom was, however, derived and dependent, represented under the similitudes of the stream and the fountain; the branch and the vine; the sun and its effulgence; the relation between them being like that of three apparent suns, 'two of them being but the parheli of the other and essentially dependent upon it, forasmuch as the second would be but the reflected image of the first, and the third but the second refracted \*'

Some persons seem anxious to make it appear that the Evangelists and Apostles never got tainted in any degree with the Platonic or Alexandrian philosophy; and that every expressed opinion or doctrine laid down by them must be implicitly received as truth. But I cannot believe that the Apostles were infallible. Whilst I venerate these men and their works, for the lovely and holy characters of both, I see plain marks in their writings that they were written by fallible men. If Peter's mind was affected by the prejudices of the Jewish school of theology, why might not Paul and John receive into their minds, and mingle in their writings, an infusion of the Alexandrian? Whether the Evangelist John, in the preface to his Gospel, uses the term *logos*, or word, in the Jewish sense, as the word or influence of God, or in the less refined sense of the Alexan-

\* Cudworth, p. 590, as cited by Thom.

drian Platonists is another matter; residing as he did at Ephesus, 'the centre of the mingling opinions of the east and west,' he probably might use it in a sense accommodating to the views both of Jews and Gentile Philosophers.

Dr. Beard, in his 'Historical Illustrations of the Trinity,' says, 'The doctrinal tendencies of Philo can be traced into immediate connexion with the early Christian church. There was an Hellenistic Judaical Gnosis, or transcendental philosophy, of which Philo may not unaptly be considered the representative, for Alexandria was the literary centre of the Hellenistic Judaism that prevailed in the Apostolic times. Of the diffusion of the Alexandrine Jewish Gnosis among the Greeks, Apollos and Cerinthus give important examples. Both appear in the Greek city of Ephesus. Apollos, as Luke (Acts xviii. 24.) states, a Jew born at Alexandria, was mighty in the Scriptures, and being instructed in the way of the Lord, as well as fervent in spirit, taught diligently the things of the Lord, while yet he had received no other baptism than that of John. Of Cerinthus our information comes from a later, but trustworthy, source. Theodoret (Fab. Hær. ii. 3.) relates, that before Cerinthus came to Ephesus, he had been to Egypt, and there received his philosophical education. That the religious philosophy of this Philonic school was not without an effect on, even the apostle Paul, who was probably led insensibly to its reception by his desire to give Christianity a universal character, and make it generally acceptable, is distinctly stated by no less an authority than the so called orthodox Lücke,\* 'His doctrine,' Lücke affirms, 'of the first and second Adam belongs to the Alexandrine philosophy.' And those who, by a careful study of the Gospels, shall have made himself aware how peculiar is the manner in which John sets forth in his doctrine of the logos, or word, the nature of the union that subsisted between God and his Son Jesus Christ, will scarcely think the opinion of Credner,† without some appearance of likelihood, that John was influenced in his representations by the prevailing modes of thought on the subject, which, taking a substantive and independent form in Alexandria, soon spread themselves in the various centres of the highest culture of the day that

\* Commentar über das E. des Johannes, Prolog. p. 284.

† Das Neue Testament i. 233. seq.

were found in Western Asia. Indeed it is not easy to understand how, without a miracle, scarcely how even with a miracle, the early development of Christian doctrine could have been kept entirely free from admixtures from the intellectual soil in which it grew and spread. At the same time it was rather the terms than the ideas, the illustrations than the doctrine, that Paul and John borrowed from the prevalent philosophy. Desirous to give a Christian, and so a true representation of the popular philosophical opinions, in order to show that true knowledge was found in Christ, and thus to discredit the doctrine of the schools as well as to gain favor for the gospel, Paul and John took up, as far as was consistent with divine truth, the phraseology of Philo and other teachers of the transcendental philosophy, and gave them a Christian application. In this view we are, in the main, supported by the respectable authority of Priestley, who held that the prologue to John's gospel was written for the express purpose of confuting the erroneous notions of Gnostic teachers.\*

The introductory part of the Gospel of St. John seems to me merely to put a simple truth into the language of Platonism, and to reconcile the prevalent conceptions of the logos with Christianity. The plain truth underlying the statement of St. John is, that the divine intelligence, the wisdom, power, and energy of the Deity (which was no second God dwelling apart from the absolute unity, but actually with God, and in point of fact God,) created all things; was the source of light and life; the inspirer of every mind, and had been given transcendently to Christ; having thus, figuratively speaking, become flesh and dwelt amongst men, who had thus in Christ beheld its glory; the glory of the well-beloved of the Father, full of grace and truth. Whatever license the language of St. John may have afforded to modern Trinitarians, it is not however to the Evangelists or the Apostles, that we are to ascribe the corruption of the beautiful doctrine of Christ; yet had they been partakers in the criminality of such an act, it would not however have been the less improper; for error never can become truth, though sanctioned by an Apostle.

Leaving however the question whether the minds of John

\* Notes, vol. xiii. p. 9. Rutt's Edition.

or Paul (for their is no pretence for alleging it of the others) had or had not become tainted by the opinions of the Alexandrian philosophy, which might be said to be a mixture of Egyptian theology, and platonic philosophy, with a sprinkling of Jewish ideas, I may just notice that the first evident and marked abandonment of the simplicity of Christ was in Gnosticism. The title Gnostic is derived from a Greek word, signifying knowledge, and denotes a person of knowledge, an enlightened Christian philosopher, as distinguished from the majority of unlearned Christians. The Gnostics wanted to lessen the reproach of Christ, to give a strong air of mysterious and supernatural dignity to a crucified leader, and to show the consistency of Christianity with the visionary systems of oriental learning. They like many others of the Grecian and Alexandrian sages, were fond of contemplating the Supreme Being as reposing in dignified quietude, and of ascribing creation, and all moral and material phenomena to the agency of various other Deities produced from the Supreme. To these inferior Deities they paid homage; they regarded the God of the Jews different from the God of the Christian, and taught that Christ was a man in appearance only, not in reality. That he was the *logos* in fact, or some other emanation from the Supreme, and that his human form was but an appearance, a phantasm. Others, allied to the Gnostics, taught that the Christ was an *Æon* or emanation from God, which descended upon the man Jesus, and left him again on his crucifixion. It is in all probability to these teachers that John alludes, when he says, 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.'

This sudden and outrageous outburst of heathen philosophy did not last long; but the desires from which it originated were still in existence, and it was only put down to give place to a doctrine brought from the same school, introduced more gradually, but scarcely less absurd or ridiculous.

A period of about thirty years intervened between the last written book of the New Testament, and the first undoubted authentic writing of the Christian Fathers; viz. that of Clement, Bishop of Rome, who makes no mention

of the Deity of Christ. I shall give two quotations from his writings, to show what were his sentiments upon the subject.

‘The Apostles brought the good news of the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is from God—Jesus was sent from God, and the Apostles from Christ, and both this was done in subordination, according to the will of God’

Speaking of Jesus, he says, ‘Through him the eyes of our heart were opened—through him the foolish and darkened mind ascends into his wonderful light—through him the sovereign Lord pleased that we should taste of immortal knowledge; who being the bright reflection of his majesty, is by so much greater than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name. For it has been written thus: ‘Who maketh his angels (or messengers) spirits, and his ministers (or servants) a flame of fire;’ but in regard to his Son, the SOVEREIGN LORD, said thus: ‘Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee; I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession.’

This seems to be a Unitarian exposition of the introduction of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The person who perhaps contributed most towards corrupting Christianity was Justin Martyr, who was born of heathen parents, about the year 89, in Flavia Neapolis, (formerly called Shechem,) in Palestine. He had spent most of his time in literary and philosophic pursuits, and had studied the works of the Platonists, of whom there was a college at Shechem. He records, in some of his writings, the pleasure with which he first received the doctrines of Platonic philosophy. He became a convert to Christianity, and brought to the exposition of the Gospel his own philosophy, which, like that of Alexandria, was a strange amalgamation of opinions formed from Egyptian theology, Platonism, and Judaism. He viewed the Gospel through the medium of Alexandrian philosophy. His only criterion of inspiration was prophecy; he regarded the Apokalypse, which he ascribes to John as an inspired book; with that exception he admits not any inspired writings amongst the Christians, and accounts the Apostles unlearned, though holy men. He regards the Old Testament as the great fountain of inspiration; and in



explaining it, resorts to the allegorical and metaphysical modes peculiar to the philosophy which he had imbibed. Although he did much to forward the present ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, yet his views fall far short of the Athanasian standard of orthodoxy. I shall make a few extracts from his writings, which will clearly show how much his mind was tainted with Pagan and platonic notions, and his anxiety to unite these with Christianity. He says, 'I will endeavour to show that he who appeared to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, and who is called God, is different from the God that made all things—numerically different, though not *in will*; for I say that he never did any thing but what that God who made all things, and above whom there is no God, willed that he should do and say.\*

'And if we say that the word of God was produced from God in a peculiar way, without ordinary generation, let this be regarded as in common with you (Pagans), who call Mercury the word, which is from God, with embassies (p. 23.) And when we say that the word, which was the first production of God, was produced without intercourse; namely, Jesus Christ, our teacher, and that he being crucified, and having died, and being risen again, ascended into heaven, we bring nothing new to those amongst you who make mention of the Sons of Jupiter.' In his writings he makes the *logos* become man in the person of Christ, yet still asserts the superiority of God the Father. 'For *next* to God (he says) we venerate and love *'the word,'* which is from the *unoriginated* and ineffable God.' In the following passages, the workings of his philosophy are well marked. In page 266, of the same dialogue, he says, 'I will produce another proof from the holy Scriptures, that in the beginning, before all creatures, God generated from himself a certain *rational power*, which is called by the Holy Spirit the glory of the Lord, and sometimes *Son*, and sometimes *wisdom*, and sometimes *angel*, and sometimes *God*, and sometimes *Lord* and *word*; and sometimes he calls himself chief captain, appearing in the form of a man to Joshua: receiving all these denominations both from his being subservient to the Father's will, and from the voluntary gene-

ration of the Father, not according to the analogy of a human generation, but of an intellectual one. For by emitting or ejecting a certain word we generate a word not by a division or separation, so that the word which is in us who project, should undergo a diminution; as in fire we see another kindled, and that from which it was lighted not made less, but remaining the same; and that also lighted from it appearing to exist without diminishing that from which it was lighted.'

He also asserts, 'That Christ is Lord of the Powers by the pleasure of him who grants him to be this.' Again he says, 'We are taught, and have already shewn that Christ was the first-born of the Father, being *'the word'* of which *all the race of men have partaken*; and those whose life was with *word or reason are Christians, though esteemed Atheists*, as Socrates, &c.'

Again he says, 'And the word of God is his Son, and he is also called Angel and Messenger; and he proclaims whatever is necessary to be known.' The entire scope of the reasonings of Justin appear to be, to twist Christianity into conformity with the platonics of the Alexandrian school, and by the aid of the allegorical interpretation of Old Testament history and prophecies, to make that book speak the language of the same philosophy. Some of these expositions are in the highest degree absurd and ludicrous, but it would extend my letter far too much to give extracts of his folly. The work of innovation once begun, it proceeded gradually, but steadily; the more powerful ecclesiastics adopting the platonic view of Christianity, and ascribing a derived and subordinate divinity to Christ. Powerful men sprang up here and there who combated these innovations; but their writings were destroyed by the stronger party in the church, and their lives and characters are but little known to us, except through the medium of their foes; and upon that subject we certainly cannot admit the testimony of the latter, when we have proof of the wholesale forgeries and despicable villainies of all kinds to which they resorted to prop up and defend their own side of the question. The Jewish Christians, and the majority of the poorer classes, who embraced Christianity, however, clung to the Unity of the Godhead. In confirmation of this I might cite several testimonies. Origen says, 'And when

you consider the faith concerning our Saviour of those of the Jews who believe in Jesus, some thinking him to be the son of Joseph and Mary, and others of Mary only, and the divine Spirit, but still without any belief in his divinity. *And they of the Jews who have received Jesus as the Christ, go by the name of Ebionites.*' Tertullian also complains of the majority of Christians even in his day objecting to the new doctrine, and having fears lest it should destroy the unity.

I will also cite the following testimonies, showing that notwithstanding the adoption of the philosophical views of the *logos*, every where apparent in their writings, the early Christian writers still acknowledged the *inferiority* of the Son.

#### IRENÆUS, A. D. 178.

'We hold the rule of truth, that there is one God Almighty, who created all things by his *logos*.'

'This is the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ; and of him (the Father) it is that Paul declared there is one God even the Father, who is above all, and through all, and in all.'—Lib. i. cap. 19; ii. cap. 3.

#### ATHENAGORAS AND THEOPHILUS.

Theophilus says, that 'God having his word resident in his own bowels generated him with his own wisdom, having emitted him like breath before all other things. This word he made his agent, of those things made by him, and through him, he made all things. This word is called the beginning, because he commands and governs all things made through him. This therefore being the breath or spirit of God, and beginning, and wisdom, and power of the Most High, descended into the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not in existence when the world was created; but the wisdom of God, which was in him and his holy word, is always present with himself.'

Athenagoras says, 'The Son of God is the mind and word of the Father. The Son is the first offspring or production, not as being from the beginning, for God being an eternal mind himself, had in him his own word, as being from everlasting rational.'

The influence of the platonics of the Alexandrian school upon these minds, surely cannot be questioned.

CLEMENS ALEXANDRIANUS, A. D. 194.

‘He who obeys the Lord, and follows prophecy, delivered through him, is perfectly formed a God in the flesh, after the image of his master or teacher.

‘And the fifth commandment follows in order, concerning the honor of Father and Mother. And it evidently calls God Father and Lord. Wherefore also it calls those who know him Sons and Gods.’—Id. p. 687.

It will be seen from the above, that the term God is not restricted by him to the Supreme Being.

‘There is one unbegotten Almighty Father, and one first begotten, by whom all things were, and without whom nothing was made. For one is truly God who made *the beginning* of all things, meaning his first begotten Son.’

TERTULLIAN, A. D. 200.

Writes thus (Adv. Prax. cvi.), ‘For as soon as God willed to produce into their substances and kinds those things which with the reason and word of wisdom he had disposed in themselves, he first produced the word itself, having in himself his inseparable (companions) reason and wisdom, that all should be made by him, by whom they were devised and set in order, or rather were already made, as being in the mind or thought of God.’

‘I do not speak of Gods and Lords, but I follow the Apostle; so that if the Father and the Son are to be named together, I call the Father God, and Jesus Christ Lord: though I can call Christ God when speaking of himself alone.’ And he goes on to explain this by declaring, that a ray of the sun may, with sufficient propriety, be called the sun.\*

ORIGEN, A. D. 230.

‘According to the historical relation of the presence or appearing among men of our Lord Jesus Christ, his common abode among men in the body, and apparent to the whole world, took place when the word became flesh, &c. Nevertheless it is necessary to know that he was formerly or

previously present (among men), although indeed not bodily, yet as being in every one of the holy men; and after the period of his visible presence he will appear again to us.'

'We may by this means solve the doubts which terrify many men, who pretend to great piety, and who are afraid of making two Gods, and through this fall into vain and impious opinions; denying that the nature of the Son is different from that of the Father, and who acknowledge that he is God in name only; or denying the divinity of the Son, and then maintaining that his nature and essence is different from that of the Father. For we must tell them that he who is *God of himself*, is THE God, as the Saviour states in his prayer to the Father, 'that they may know thee, THE only true God;' but that whosoever becomes divine by partaking of his divinity, cannot be styled THE God, but a God, among whom *especially is the first-born of all creatures*.\*

I might go on quoting from several other Fathers to the same effect, but I shall content myself with one from Athanasius himself, who is usually accounted the very rule of orthodoxy.

#### ATHANASIUS, A. D. 325.

'For there is one God, and there is not another besides Him. When it is said that the Father is the only God, that he is one God, 'I am the FIRST,' and 'I am the LAST,' it is well said. This is not said, however, to take away from the Son; for he also is *in* THE ONE, FIRST, and ONLY ONE, as being the only *Logos*, Wisdom, and Effulgence of him who is THE ONE, and THE ALONE, and THE SUPREME.'†

From the above quotations, and indeed from a perusal of the entire works of these early writers, no one can fail to perceive that their views of Christianity were influenced by the prevailing philosophy, and often expressed in its very language, and that their views as to the equality of the Son with the Father, fell far short of the present standard of orthodoxy. They fluctuated between their desire to exalt Jesus into the *logos* of God; to proclaim the union between Christ and the later Platonists; and their fear on the other hand of expressing ideas not reconcileable with the unity of

\* Comment. vol. ii. p. 47.

† Orat. iii. con. Arian.

God. They were embarrassed with the prevailing philosophy on the one side, and with the doctrine of one God, expressed in the Jewish Scriptures, and by Christ, and with the mass of unlearned Christians and the converted Jews on the other; the two last mentioned classes objecting to their innovations, as is evident from some of their writings. Confusion at length followed upon confusion. The logos or wisdom of God, strictly speaking, was an attribute of the Deity; but when viewed, not as an attribute, but a person distinct from God, in Christ, and yet God and eternal, conflicting opinions increased more and more even amongst the innovators, and separations became inevitable. The Arians would not hear of two Gods, and represented Christ as the Son or Messenger of the Most High, but the first of created beings. The Athanasians regarded him as an eternal emanation from God, of the same substance with the Father and co-eternal. In unriddling this puzzle the most bitter controversies ensued; the charities of life were destroyed in the troubled waters of metaphysical dispute, and a hollow creed or opinion was thought a more valuable possession for a man than the spirit and life of Christ; than a mind full of holy confidence in God, and affectionate earnestness for the welfare of mankind.

The most unhappy wranglings were stirred up by the metaphysical platonists of the church, the Arians and Trinitarians; disputes by no means involving the question, whether Christianity should be corrupted at all or not; but *how much*? Its corruption seemed to be a thing agreed upon by both sides; the only question was how strong an infusion of heathen sentiment should be mixed with it. As both parties had in their ranks ecclesiastics in great numbers of the worst possible dispositions, ready to split a hair in dispute, and to forge, defame, banish, or murder, for the maintenance of their dogmatism, it was by no means surprising that the Emperor Constantine should try to have the dispute settled, and something like peace and quietness restored. He little knew at that time how vain is the hope for peace where (with perhaps a few individual exceptions) all the disputants seemed to have entirely lost sight of the great essential of Christianity; the maintenance of the spirit and life of the Saviour; the purification of their own minds from grovelling appetites and pursuits, to a

high aim for the glory of God, and the advancement of human happiness.

The Emperor Constantine, however, had a council called ; it is known by the name of the Council of Nice, and was held about the year 325. He had previously begged and prayed of these noisy and opinionative men not to disturb the peace of the empire and of the church, about what appeared to him a very insignificant matter ; but this advice produced little effect. The Emperor attended the council in person. The first thing the priests did were to quarrel with each other. 'The Bishops (says Dr. Waddington, a dignitary of the church) began, by much personal dissension, and presented to the Emperor a variety of written accusations against each other ; the Emperor burnt all their libels, and exhorted them to peace and unity. They then proceeded to examine the momentous question proposed to them.\* After much subtle disputation the Athanasian party prevailed. They decided that Christ was an eternally derivative and begotten Deity—God of God, as light is from light, of the same substance as the Father, but they did not attribute any personal Deity to the Holy Spirit. They settled the creed, called Nicene, as follows :

'We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible ; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten and only begotten of the Father ; that is of the substance of the Father, God of (out of) God, light of (from) light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, by whom all things were made, both in heaven and in earth : who for us men, and for our salvation, descended and was incarnate, and was made man, suffered, and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead. (We believe) also in the Holy Ghost.'

'The holy catholic and apostolic church anathematizes those who say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, and that before he was begotten he was not, and that he was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or essence, and is created, changeable, or alterable.'

‘Such,’ says Jortin, ‘was the Nicene creed, as it stood originally, and before it was interpolated by subsequent councils. Our church hath dropped the anathematizing clauses at the end, and one cannot help wishing that the Nicene Fathers had done the same. The Christians in times following were perpetually making anathematisms, even upon the slightest and poorest occasions; and it is really a wonder that they did not at last insert in their litanies, ‘We beseech thee to curse and confound the Pelagians, Semi-pelagians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Monothelites, Jacobites, Iconoclasts, and all heretics and schismatics.’\*’

The doctors of the church thus settled the creed; the creed itself, in reality settled nothing—like all creeds it made no peace, for the question, what is truth, still remains after all the councils and synods in Christendom have wrangled, and decided.

Persecutions, forgeries, exiles, and deaths followed the Nicene Council; violent hands were laid upon all dissentients, and the most monstrous injuries and injustice were inflicted. Sure and constant fruits of creed religions! The Emperor Constantine took part with the Athanasians, banished Arius and the Bishops who sided with him, and ordered the books of Arius to be burnt; adding in his edict ‘If any man be found to have concealed a copy of those books, and not to have instantly produced it, and thrown it into the fire, he shall be put to death. The Lord be with you all.’ (Jortin, vol. ii. p. 205.)

Sometime afterwards it was found that the creed of Nice was defective in orthodoxy; it simply stated, ‘We believe in the Holy Ghost.’ So the council of Constantinople, in 321, made the following addition to it:

‘We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeded from the *Father*; who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets.’ Even after this alteration the creed was still found imperfect, it did not square sufficiently with the Pagan triad, the third member of whom was generally the result of the two first, nor with the Alexandrian Trinity. The Holy Ghost was said in the Nicene creed to proceed from the Father only.



So, about the year 589, another council amended it, by stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. Still the creed was incomplete; argument followed argument; men varied in opinion upon what they considered essential in the dogmatic formula, and filled the world with controversies about things of no importance, involving the most minute and technical quibbling. Another controversy which arose after the Nicene council had settled the first Nicene creed, related to the particular mode in which the divine and human natures were united in Christ. This dispute engaged the attention of Christendom, in connection with another, viz. the proper appellation of the Virgin Mary. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, made such a distinction between the divine and human natures in Christ, as to deny that Mary ought to be called 'Mother of God.' Apollinaris on the other hand overlooked the humanity, and by his mode of teaching made the history of Christ resolve itself into the history of the doings, sufferings, and death of God. Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, (between whom and Nestorius there was a grudge and jealousy, as to the relative dignity of their sees,) took up the dispute, abused and anathematized each other about it, and in the end created such a tumult, that the Emperor Theodosius called a council to settle the point. Cyril presided, and manifested his nefarious and partial mind so plainly as to refuse to wait the arrival of the bishops known to be friendly to Nestorius. 'To secure his advantages (says Dr. Waddington) he had brought with him from Egypt a number of robust and daring fanatics, who acted as his soldiery.' The council decreed that the union of the divine and human in Christ was so intimate, that Mary might properly be called 'MOTHER OF GOD.' The whole council was an arena of abuse and disorder, so much so, that Theodosius, when dismissing it, said 'God is my witness, that I am not the author of this confusion. His providence will discern and punish the guilty. Return to your provinces, and may your private virtues repair the mischiefs and scandal of your meeting.' The victorious party, however, soon pushed their opinions to an extreme, asserting, that in Christ was only one nature, the incarnate word. So the church was again in a ferment, and another council was held at Ephesus, A. D. 449, the proceedings at which were

of so tumultuous and brutal a kind, that even Ecclesiastics themselves designate it by the appropriate cognomen of the Assembly of Banditti. In the year 451, a general council was held at Chalcedon, where it was decided, first of all that Jesus was of the same essence with God as to his divine nature, only in the sense in which he was of the same essence with other men as to his human nature, thus denying his *numerical* oneness with God, and merely referring him to the same *class* of Beings, as two men are of one nature. However, the Emperor Marcion and the Bishop of Rome being dissatisfied with this, it was rescinded, and the council finally decreed, that 'Jesus Christ was one person in two distinct natures, without any confusion or mixture.'

At length somebody helped these wranglers out of the pit, and effected that which council upon council had struggled in vain to accomplish. In the sixth century, the finishing touch of absurdity was placed, by a private hand, upon the edifice, which centuries had been endeavouring to rear, and a document was produced, which has since been adopted as a standard creed by orthodox churches of Europe, called the Athanasian creed. It may truly be said to be the climax of dogmatic arrogance and jargon. It has been attributed to the pen of Vigilius Tapsensis, a Bishop of the sixth century; but whoever is its author it is quite certain, and is in fact admitted by the best orthodox writers, not to have been written by Athanasius, nor for some centuries after his death. Perhaps no one knows who wrote it; and as the authorship of it will not redound to the lasting honor of any man, it is perhaps not worth while to enquire. In addition to its inconsistencies and subtleties it manifests an anathematizing bigotry—the very opposite of the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is as follows :

'Whoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the

Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal; and yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated; but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity, to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion: to say, there be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is alone, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect man; of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood. Who although he be God and man; yet he is not two, but one Christ: one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance; but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so man and God is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; he ascended into heaven; he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good, shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.'

We have thus traced the doctrine up to its present ecclesiastical form. I must conclude the subject in my next letter, by a few observations.

## LETTER VII.

### CONCLUSION.

SIR,—I trust that the brief historical sketch which I have given you in my former letters, with the accompanying observations, may lead you, as far as your means and leisure permit, to extended investigation of the subject, which has occupied our attention. I feel convinced that an attentive research of ecclesiastical history, and a rational and manly application of your powers of analysis and reflection will tend to confirm the views I have given of the causes, which led to the formation of the ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity.

We have seen that no such doctrine was taught in Judaism; that it formed no portion of the Mosaic code; nor of the writings of Jewish prophets or sages; that the doctrines of Christ were entirely free from it, and marked by a purity and simplicity which are the antipodes of Trinitarian dogmatism. We have seen the germ of the doctrine in eastern mythologies, and have followed it through the refinements of Grecian and Alexandrian philosophy into the Christian church, where under the influence, at first of men imbued with oriental metaphysics, and afterwards of designing and power-assuming priests, who found it convenient to attach more importance to a belief than a life, it attained its present form. There are, however, some things connected with the doctrine which we ought to notice, and view with philosophic impartiality. Error is oftentimes the exaggeration of a truth, an excrescence growing upon a living thing, some symbolic representation of a conception where the symbol has at length got the place of the thing signified; or some gross material form, in which a simple fact has been historically announced and transmitted. I have already spoken in my fourth letter of the instincts and desires of the mind which originated mythological ideas, and it is necessary to revert to the subject again, and to view it in another aspect, in order to ascertain the truth covered and almost concealed by the dogma of the Trinity. Progression from rude beginnings is the law of man and of

the world. In furthering this progress, the Almighty employs secondary agencies. He endows every portion of nature, and every human being with some marked peculiarity of bodily or mental property or disposition, and makes this infinite variety and multiformity all minister to the accomplishment of his purposes. Hardness, softness, fluidity, attraction, cohesion, luminosity, heat, cold, and other properties of material bodies, the several instinct of animals, and the differences in talent, sentiment, and disposition of human beings, are all of them parts of a vast plan of benevolence and wisdom, and tend to one great end of unity, harmony, and order. 'All nature's difference makes all nature's peace.' This variety of talents and tendencies observable in individuals, characterizes nations also. Ancient Phœnicia was the birth-place and nursery of mechanical arts and commerce; Greece of poetry and the fine arts, and so on. The Hebrews also had their mission, to declare the truths of monotheism, to purify the religious feelings of mankind. Their notions of God and of religion were doubtless in many respects imperfect, and their conceptions of him were often mingled with their own human passions and dispositions; still Judæa was a nursery of religion. Out of her bosom came forth seers and prophets, who announced exalted truths, and called men to duty with a fervent and holy zeal, and at length, after a long succession of holy men, came the Great Teacher, who brought life and immortality fully to light. The religious feeling, which amongst the Jews was comparatively pure, was not dormant amongst the other nations of antiquity, but a low state of intellectual and moral endowment, with strong animal desires, and an incipient civilization prevented the feeling from getting utterance save in a sensual embodiment, or mingled with absurd speculations. Their mythologies exhibit the ideas in dim twilight, which amongst the Hebrews were seen in a brighter light. Instead of one wise and good God creating, upholding, and preserving all things by his wisdom and intelligence, and from whom proceeds all moral and intellectual light and endowments, they conceive of a Deity doing all these things by secondary Deities, whom he begets by some process similar to carnal generation, and which he sends out in incarnations or otherwise, upon different errands to create, destroy, teach philosophy, religion, and so on. Still a minute investigation of the *primitive* forms of ancient religions

show that originally they were expressions of feelings and conceptions, which rude minds turned into falsehoods by the sensual garb in which they clothed them, but which the Jews expressed with more simplicity and spirituality. Even the Jew occasionally attributes to God carnal passions, and conceives of him as a man walking, talking, repenting, wrathful, and so on, all indications of imperfect culture and of a rude age; but the notion of God in other ancient theologies is vastly more gross. Pagan ideas were undoubtedly much purified by the Platonic and Alexandrian philosophy, but the teachings of the later Platonists, and of the Christian disciples from the same school, exhibited, as we have already seen, marks of Pagan opinions. The logos, which at first seemed merely to be regarded as the divine wisdom and intelligence; and its influence which acted upon and in nature and the human mind, taught the prophets, and had been given in its highest manifestations to Christ, at length came to be spoken of as distinct beings, evolved from the Supreme by process of generation or otherwise. Out of this refinement of Paganism the doctrine of the Trinity arose—that doctrine stands in contrast to true religion, as manifested partially in Judaism and fully in Christ. Christianity is the simplicity of religion and godliness; and simplicity is the highest form of perfection. Trinitarianism is the latest form of polytheism. It is the Pagan idea of subordinate divine beings contemporary with the supreme cause; its begettings and incarnations, its notions of appeasing the Deity by a bloody sacrifice, together with the terrible aspect in which it views God in its doctrines of reprobation, eternal torments, &c., all present close resemblances to the worst forms of heathen superstition.

The embodiment of spiritual truths in sensual imagery, where other than rhetorical or poetical, indicates a low state of mental power, and the retention of the gross outward symbol, often presents a formidable obstacle to pure and spiritual ideas. Men's interests, prejudices, and associations became allied to the *form*, and they resist with energy, and often with cruelty, all efforts to divest the truth of its covering, and to realize without the symbol the thing signified. The great truths of religion are that there is a God of love, all wise, all powerful, all gracious; the tender and compassionate Father of his creatures, who by his will diffuses throughout nature her laws and energies, raises up

(according perhaps to fixed laws which we know not of) various agencies to carry on his work of progressively improving the world: who employed the Jews on the mission of developing and educating the religious constitution of mankind, completing that dispensation by the fullest inspiration of religion and goodness in Jesus Christ, through whom he thus blesses and regenerates in a religious point of view the race of men, making them as they participate in the character and imbibe the spirit of the Saviour at one with God. In the doctrine of the Trinity, the spiritual ideas of God, blessing the world and mankind by his spirit and influence, and inspiring Jesus to be the great educator of humanity, are all embodied in carnal conception after the manner of ancient polytheism. Christ is a God, begotten of God, and incarnate; the divine influence is a separate God, produced from the two first. The gross imagery covers a truth—the misfortune is it sometimes conceals it. It is the disguise which men's rude feelings have wrapped about the idea of God and his wisdom; about Christ, and his nobleness and gentleness of soul; about the influences and laws which are all around and within us. Men accustomed to deify greatness, struck with the majestic humanity of Christ, cried out it is a God, the *logos* incarnate, and to realize this idea, and at the same time account for his humanity, they wove about his birth the history of a miraculous conception, the mysterious intercourse of the Deity with a virgin. Trinitarianism thus identifies itself with Polytheism, which deified the attributes of the Deity, and the result of the operation of those attributes observable in nature, and in human strength, wisdom, and goodness.

But we must put away childish things—we must worship in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. The maturity of mankind approaches—slowly it may be, but we must do our allotted work and wait with patience. The superior productions of nature, and the superior attributes of mankind have the largest infancy and the slowest progression. The insect soon reaches its maturity and passes away; the larger animals have a longer nursing; man, the noblest in the lower creation, the longest of all. The faculties of the mind are developed in the same ratio; the animal first and most rapidly; next the perceptive; then the reasoning and moral powers. The same eternal law is

observable in society; first, animal barbarism, the law of might; then the law of right; then the law of love. Let us then do our duty, and be reconciled with the tardy steps with which reason, simplicity, and love assume their domain in religion; and at the difficulty with which the rude goat-skin covering is taken from the beautiful statuary of truth and piety. It will come at last,—pure and spiritual philosophy and religion will come, and man's moral and religious nature shall yet harmonize with his condition. Science and religion, nature and revelation, human and divine, shall be one. Nothing can warp my faith in this coming glory. It is pointed at by prophecy, and supported by all the analogies of nature, and the hopes and instincts of man. Even the discord of schools of science, and of sects in religion tends to elaborate truth, and secure a spiritual unity, as the jarring of instruments tuning for the music which shall gladden every bosom.

'At times all seems confusion,  
Yet not such that it confounds;  
For all hath strange allusion  
To the advent of sweet sounds.'

Truth in its passages through the ages, in its union with man, but passes through several forms; and becomes buried for a while in the gross conceptions of man's imperfect and untutored passions and understanding. So clouds obscure for a time the glorious sun. The strong man can alone discern the naked truth, the weak view it through gross images and material symbols. A strong eyesight he must have, who inspects the luminary of day, except through an opaque medium. But man will be sufficient for all God intends him to do.

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#### NOTICE.

The above pamphlet forms one of a series of Tracts now publishing, to promote a pure faith and the interests of true religion. Agents are wanted for the sale of the series, to whom the usual allowance will be made. Those who wish to aid in this work, will be pleased to apply to the Printer.